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Andrew Dunn Walk/Run hits the road

Over 400 individuals took part in the 2011 Andrew Dunn Walk/Run on May 7.

By Dana Trapp

Five years ago, the Andrew Dunn Memorial Walk/Run began making a difference to those living with mental health issues.

Today, the organization has raised almost \$150,000 and their volunteer committee continues to grow. They are advancing with change and continue to share and bring awareness to many people and organizations.

The Andrew Dunn Walk/Run took place from the One Insurance Arena in Oakbank Saturday, May 7. Organizers say 400 individuals participated in the morning's event with more than 600 in attendance.

"The numbers of those involved continues to increase as the years go by," explained Andrew's mother and event chair Judy Dunn. "This year, there had to be more than 200 involved. Our volunteer base is also growing and from our first year raising \$13,500 to what we believe is \$45,000 this year. It's just amazing."

The event is held in memory of Andrew Dunn, who took his life at the young age of 23.

His mother Judy and a network of friends created the Andrew Dunn Foundation in celebration of his life and to contribute to the fight against depression and mental illness.

The foundation partnered with the Health Science Centre Foundation during their first year of existence. They also work very closely in partnership with Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba.

The morning of the event, light rain fell upon the participants, but that certainly didn't dampen their spirit as they prepared to walk and run together in support of the cause.

"I think the weather had some impact," said Dunn. "It was really raining hard in Winnipeg but we just seemed to get a little drizzle and then it stopped."

Prior to the kick off and start of the event, a flash mob performed moving several to tears. This rehearsed group of strangers also came together at Kildonan Place on April 30 and again at the Oakbank Motor Hotel last week with the purpose of bringing awareness and support to mental health.

Several morning speeches were heard before Ace Burpee of HOT 103FM counted down to the start of the event.

“This event is not all about Andrew, my son. Yes, it might be a little personal for me but we’re doing this for everyone,” said Dunn that morning. “It’s all about remembering the people who need the help and may lose their lives but they didn’t need to. It’s about collectively doing something about this.”

Dunn said the day after every fund raiser, she thinks she won’t be able to do another, adding it can often be quite the struggle.

She said those feelings quickly subside as she starts receiving e-mails and encouraging feedback.

“I received one e-mail today from a family who came from Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Winnipeg. Their group of 14 raised over \$2,000 and plan to return next year,” Dunn said. “While they were walking and talking, they felt the event was so healing to them. They realized that they’re no longer ashamed of what their brother did and felt that they’re going to be okay. That is just incredible to me.”

“We should be ashamed because we don’t do enough and be ashamed because we couldn’t help our people,” she added. “We need to do more on all levels. Our governments, society, health systems all need to step up.”

Provencher MP Vic Toews participated and ran the 10km event that morning. Toews has been a strong supporter over the past several years. Springfield Reeve Jim McCarthy and MLA of Springfield Ron Schuler were other dignitaries out that morning.

“Judy Dunn and her dedicated group of family, friends and volunteers have had the courage and compassion to channel the pain of their loss into something positive, in the form of the Andrew Dunn Foundation,” said Toews. “I commend their continued dedication to raising funds and awareness in support of those affected by mental illness.”

As donations continue to trickle in and others who may have missed this annual event or would still like to donate are encouraged to do so by visiting the Andrew Dunn web site at www.andrewdunn.org. Donations can also be made through the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba or by contacting Judy Dunn directly at jd4mdam@gmail.com